
Subject: [EXTERNAL] FBI Monthly Counterintelligence Bulletin | April 2020

*The FBI's Counterintelligence Division produces the **FBI Monthly Counterintelligence Bulletin** to keep federal, state, local, and private sector partners informed about counterintelligence threats and issues.*

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U.S. Department of Defense Linguist Charged with Espionage

Mariam Taha Thompson, a U.S. Department of Defense linguist with a Top Secret security clearance, was charged on March 4 via a criminal complaint with transmitting classified information—including the identifies of active confidential human sources—to a Lebanese co-conspirator with apparent connections to Hizballah, a designated foreign terrorist organization. According to court documents, over a six-week period Thompson accessed dozens of files and operational cables outside the scope of her assigned duties and allegedly shared classified national defense information with an unindicted co-conspirator in whom she was romantically interested. FBI agents arrested Thompson on February 27 at an overseas U.S. military facility. If convicted, she faces up to life in prison. [Read about the charges.](#)

Chinese National Sentenced for Stealing Trade Secrets Worth \$1 Billion

Chinese national and U.S. legal permanent resident Hongjin Tan was sentenced on February 27 to two years in federal prison and ordered to pay \$150,000 in restitution for stealing trade secrets worth \$1 billion from his former employer, an Oklahoma-based petroleum company. Tan pleaded guilty in November 2019 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma following an FBI investigation, admitting he stole product manufacturing information from his former employer and used a thumb drive to copy hundreds of files containing the proprietary information. [Read about the sentencing.](#)

Former DIA Employee Pleads Guilty to Leaking Classified National Defense Information

Former Defense Intelligence Agency employee Henry Kyle Frese pleaded guilty on February 20 in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia to one count of willfully transmitting national defense information. In his plea agreement, Frese admitted on at least 16 occasions he provided a journalist with Secret or Top Secret information that led to the publication of at least eight articles containing classified information about foreign governments' weapons systems. Frese also admitted he conducted searches on classified government systems at least 30 times in response to requests from the journalist and a fellow member of the media, and that he communicated classified information to another individual via a social media site's messaging feature. He faces up to 10 years in prison. [Read about the plea.](#)

University of Tennessee Researcher Arrested for Wire Fraud and Making False Statements about Affiliation with Chinese University

Anming Hu—an associate professor in the University of Tennessee's Mechanical, Aerospace, and Biomedical Engineering Department—was arrested on February 27 and charged with three counts each of wire fraud and making false statements. An investigation conducted jointly by the FBI, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and U.S. Department of Energy revealed Hu allegedly concealed his affiliation with Beijing University of Technology while receiving funding from NASA. Federal law prohibits NASA from using appropriated funds on projects in collaboration with the Chinese government or Chinese universities. If convicted, Hu faces up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for each count of wire fraud, as well as up to five years in prison for each count of making false statements. [Read about the charges.](#)

Chinese Nationals Charged with Laundering More Than \$100 Million in Cryptocurrency

A two-count indictment unsealed on March 2 in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia charged Chinese nationals Tian Yinyin and Li Jiadong for their roles in a scheme to launder more than \$100 million worth of cryptocurrency allegedly stolen by North Korean hackers. The FBI's investigation, conducted jointly with the Internal Revenue Service and Homeland Security Investigations, revealed Yinyin and Jiadong allegedly transmitted funds they knew had been stolen in 2018 by North Korean co-conspirators who hacked a virtual currency exchange and had been used to facilitate the evasion of U.S. and United Nations sanctions on North Korea. In addition, Yinyin and Jiadong allegedly failed to register their money-transmitting business with the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, as required by law. If apprehended and convicted, they face up to 20 years in prison for conspiracy to launder monetary instruments, five years in prison for operating an unlicensed money transmitting business, a \$500,000 fine, and the potential forfeiture of assets. [Read about the charges.](#)

Iranian National Extradited to Texas for Illegally Exporting Military Items from the United States to Iran

Iranian citizen and UAE resident Merdad Ansari was extradited on March 14 from Georgia to the United States to face charges related to his alleged role in a conspiracy to obtain sensitive military technology for Iran, in violation of U.S. sanctions on Iran. An investigation conducted jointly by the FBI and Homeland Security Investigations revealed Ansari allegedly helped Iran develop its weapons programs by obtaining components that could be used for nuclear weapons, missile guidance and development, offensive electronic warfare, surveillance, and other military systems. Ansari's co-conspirator, Susan Yip, was sentenced to two years in prison following her guilty plea, and a third defendant, Mehrdad Foomanie, remains a fugitive. [Read about the extradition.](#)

California Man Sentenced to Four Years in Prison for Acting as an Agent of the People's Republic of China

U.S. citizen Xuehua Peng was sentenced on March 16 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California to four years in prison and ordered pay a \$30,000 fine for acting as an agent of the Chinese government without notifying the Attorney General. In a plea agreement filed two months after his arrest by FBI agents last year, Peng admitted he executed dead drops, delivered payments, and personally transported memory cards to Beijing that contained classified information related to U.S. national security, all at the direction of operatives with China's Ministry of State Security. [Read about the sentencing.](#)

Former West Virginia University Professor Pleads Guilty to Fraud in Connection with Participation in a Chinese Talent Recruitment Program

James Patrick Lewis, a former West Virginia University physics professor, pleaded guilty on March 10 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of West Virginia to one count of federal program fraud in connection with his participation in a Chinese talent recruitment program. In his plea agreement, Lewis admitted he agreed to work for the Chinese Academy of Sciences for at least three years as part of the Thousand Talents Program—a Chinese government program offering researchers incentives to work in China to advance the country’s science and technology capabilities—in exchange for more than \$800,000 in salary and subsidies. Lewis admitted he then spent most of the fall 2018 semester working in China while collecting more than \$20,000 in salary from West Virginia University after fraudulently informing the university he required parental leave to care for his newborn child. Lewis faces up to 10 years in prison and \$250,000 in financial penalties. [Read about the charges.](#)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHT

The following information has been prepared by outlets outside the U.S. government and has not been corroborated by the FBI or its partners. It is presented here for your situational awareness.

Foreign Policy Highlights Chinese Government’s Coronavirus Propaganda Efforts

A March 2 article in *Foreign Policy* detailed China’s propaganda efforts in the wake of the global pandemic, including the Chinese government’s praise for its leaders and authoritarian approach. According to the article, the Chinese government’s public relations campaign—including its recent compilation of state media reports in *A Battle Against Epidemic: China Combating COVID-19 in 2020*—has not only highlighted President Xi Jinping’s heroism and the Chinese Communist Party’s critical role in fighting the virus’s spread but also focused on anti-American conspiracy theories and denials that the virus originated in China. [Read the *Foreign Policy* article.](#)

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